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Venezuela bans private gun ownership

🕒 1 June 2012



Venezuela has brought a new gun law into effect which bans the commercial sale of firearms and ammunition.

Until now, anyone with a gun permit could buy arms from a private company.

Under the new law, only the army, police and certain groups like security companies will be able to buy arms from the state-owned weapons manufacturer and importer.

The ban is the latest attempt by the government to improve security and cut crime ahead of elections in October

Venezuela saw more than 18,000 murders last year and the capital, Caracas, is thought to be one of the most dangerous cities in Latin America.

'Must do more'

The government has been running a gun amnesty in the run-up to the introduction of the new law to try to encourage people to give up their illegal arms without fear of consequences.

One member of the public in Caracas told the BBC: "They're killing people every day. This law is important but they need to do more, they're not doing enough now."

Hugo Chavez's government says the ultimate aim is to disarm all civilians, but his opponents say the police and government may not have the capacity or the will to enforce the new law.

Criminal violence is set to be a major issue in presidential elections later in the year.

Campaign group The Venezuela Violence Observatory said last year that violence has risen steadily since Mr Chavez took office in 1999.

Several Latin American countries have murder rates far higher than the global average of 6.9 murders per 100,000 people.

According to a **recent United Nations report**, South America, Central America and the Caribbean have the highest rates of murder by firearms in the world.

It found that over 70% of all homicides in South America are as a results of guns - in Western Europe, the figure was closer to 25%.

Analysis

By Sarah GraingerBBC News, Caracas

Besides the health of President Chavez, security is the main concern for voters ahead of presidential elections in October.

While voters don't seem to hold Mr Chavez responsible for the insecurity, the situation has worsened throughout his 13 years in office.

The government's most recent statistics put the murder rate at around 48 per 100,000, although some non-governmental organisations estimate it's much higher - 60 per 100,000 in 2011, one of the highest rates in the world.

Critics say the new gun laws and other recently announced measures, like a victim's compensation fund, are just the latest in a long line of failed attempts to bolster security.

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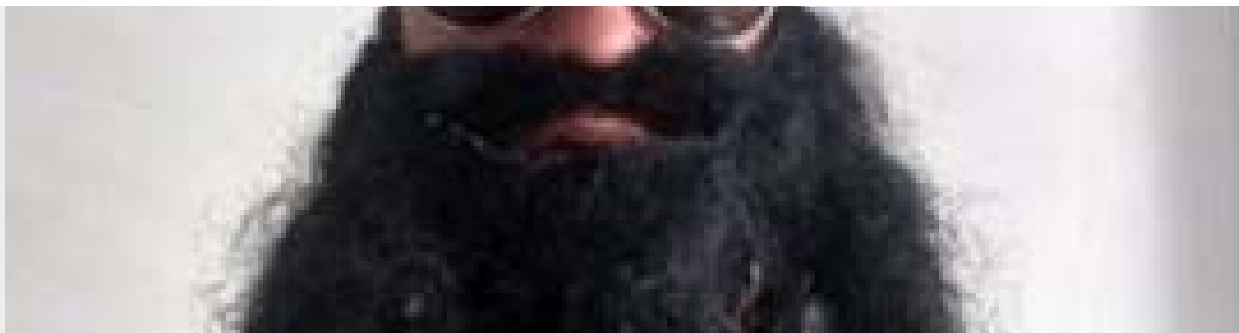
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